Future's Prospects: Appropriating the Past in Pope's *Windsor-Forest* and Looking Towards the Future in Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*

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This essay examines the prospect poem and argues that its complicated form results from the way it inherently grapples with historicity, temporality, and nationalism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.[1] Emerging from a seventeenth-century Royalist poetic tradition, the prospect poem celebrated the restoration of the Monarchy with versified images of a secure and stable British future. In the hands of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century British poets, this genre demonstrated its formal flexibility in accommodating both patriotic and apocalyptic visions. I examine two landmark works, Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest* (1763) and Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812), and suggest that they represent two opposite poles of the prospect poem's vision of the future.

For Pope, the genre imagines an optimistic prophecy of Britain's early eighteenth-century imperial ascendancy, fresh off the 1713 signing of the Treaty of Utrecht (which ended the Spanish War of Succession). *Windsor-Forest* represents Britain as a new Arcadia, but one grounded in the nationalist soil of Windsor. Barbauld, however, turns the prospect grim and imagines an Empire languishing in financial woes and mired in the French War. *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* moves the prospect *from* England *to* America, thereby inverting Pope's—and his fellow neo-Augustans'—views of Britain's magnetic power. Barbauld upturns the genre's nationalist agenda by uprooting what I have termed the *garden state*: the physical manifestation of the prospect poem in cultivated and enclosed eighteenth-century British gardens. My paper uses these seemingly polar opposite versions of the prospect poem in order to reveal the genre's discrete formal and ideological pliability that accommodates both visions of a hopeful and a disastrous future. Upon further inspection, the same formal elements that go into shaping the genre's optimistic prospective dream simultaneously allow for a portentous nightmare. In the pages to come, I will begin with a literary history of the prospect poem, then move to a discussion of how technological advancements in surveying and telling time affected the poem, before grounding these discussions in the English garden and concluding with how these issues inform the verses of both works.

The prospect poem owes much to the century's poetic and technical innovations of vision and chronometry. Though the poem includes a litany of formal devices—an all-seeing Muse, a hilltop view, a panegyric, a representation of rural sports, views of historical sites—the prospect poem is a mixed form that borrows from the pastoral and georgic. Scholars believe that the prospect poem originated in the seventeenth century as poets, like John Denham and Edmund Waller, began crafting the genre's political and nationalistic contours. Their poems *Cooper's Hill* (1642) and *St. James Park* (1661) respectively focused the poetic eye on British landmarks such as St. Paul's Cathedral, St. James Park, Thames River, and the Royal Forest of Windsor.[2] Setting

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[1] The lion's share of the "complication" stems from scholars' difficulty in naming the prospect poem. It eludes classification: called by turns a loco-descriptive, topographical, or progress poem. My investments here lie less in the nomenclature of this genre and more in the formal elements that make the prospect poem what it is.

[2] It should be noted that among John Denham's many occupations, surveying was one of them. He was appointed *Surveyor of Works* after Inigo Jones.

the scene for Alexander Pope, Denham and Cooper's poetic vistas anticipated the eighteenth-century's development of the topographical survey, a scientific and methodical ordering and mapping of properties, estates, and even nations. This advancement, I argue, allowed surveyors and poets alike to define and demarcate boundaries. Eighteenth-century surveying relied on using fixed hillside sites, or surveying stations, to take various sightings and triangulating distances to replicate accurate readings for maps. For Pope, the prospect poem's hilltop view continues the genre's lineage but also emphasizes the view's fixed, stable, and objective aspect. This view allows prospect poets to demarcate and triangulate the historical sites of England in order to mark the Empire as the central power in the world. Moreover, the eighteenth century's advancement of chronometry and theories of time also contribute to the prospect poem. The poem's projection into the future relies on a similarly rooted and linearly temporal perspective. Like the surveying stations, the present situates a (temporal) reference point in order to coordinate what comes before and after. In theoretical terms, this is a version of Walter Benjamin's notion of an "instantaneous present" which is that static and fixed moment. Benjamin notes that the eighteenth century helped usher in the notion of an "empty homogenous time" that represented a fluid time, governed not by cycles but by neutral movements of a clock's hands.[3] But as chronometry advanced and more and more Britons increasingly relied on mechanical timepieces to measure precisely time's passage, eighteenth-century poets resisted this advancement and clung to the older notion of Messianic Time, which foretells and forecloses time from Genesis to the Apocalypse and reveals time as the continual return of cycles. Despite the early rippling of time's fluidity, Pope's *Windsor-Forest* fixes on a cyclical view of time and history where Golden Age, not hours and seconds, augurs the return of a future Great Britain.

The eighteenth-century English garden was grounded in issues of surveying (to order and organize the display of cultivated nature) and timing (to plan for the blossoming of specific flowers.) As Maynard Mack has extensively demonstrated, Pope's fascination with gardening was rooted in his fascination with controlling nature with art and containing profound thoughts with measured heroic couplets. Beginning with his early exposure to these horticultural activities in Binfield, a stone's throw from Windsor Forest, Pope perfected his garden state in his grotto in Twickenham. But the garden resonated with all poets; it recalls, after all, humankind's first garden in Eden. When eighteenth-century poets put their ink-stained hands on the Edenic trope, they quickly connected God's garden in Eden to England's garden in Windsor Forest. That is, they imported Eden's perennial promise of Adam and Eve's eternal bliss to Britain's new Golden Age. Because the Royal Forest of Windsor resembles less an actual natural and organic forest and looks to be more a glorified garden sanctioned by the Empire, Pope's use of it in his poem encloses time and space on nationalistic soil.

My reading of *Windsor-Forest* examines the ways in which Pope fixes his poetic and historical survey. Throughout the poem, Pope strategically places adverbs ("here" and "there") into his verses to temporally and visually delimit his prospect in England. When he opens *Windsor-Forest* to a prospect of the eponymous "garden," the poetic vista appears like the static views from a surveying station. The "here" refers both to the location of England and to the present moment of the Empire; the "there," in contrast, casts the vision to both the edges of the geographic boundary (the "there" where England ends) and the "there" of a future Golden Age. The spatial and historical boundaries created by that duality work to represent Britain as a bounded and glorified garden at the center of the world. Thus, he includes in the poem a scene where Na-

[3] Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1969) 262.

tive Americans are magnetically drawn to Queen Anne's court.[4] By invoking the way England can attract even uncouth Western "savages" from the supposed "New World" back to the "Old," Pope suggests that the Empire occupies a stable, cultivating, and powerful centrality. Moreover, this event will recur in the future. The poetic present in *Windsor-Forest* creates a platform to witness and celebrate Britain's cycle of glory.

Barbauld, on the other hand, unmoors Pope's *garden state* by offering an apocalyptic vision of Britain's future. That she published *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* in 1812 demonstrates that she already rejects time's cyclicality and embraces its chaotic fluidity. Time, evacuated of Messianic markers, opens up epochs and disrupts the telos of history's supposed cycles. Unlike Pope who begins with visual prospects ("here" and "there"), Barbauld invokes aural aspects and focuses not on peace, but war. The threat of Napoleonic Wars actually reaching England's shores breaks the garden's enclosed safety. She rejects the analogy of a British Eden by prophesizing England in ruins: flowers decaying and castles crumbling. There is no "second Golden Age" for England. In stark contrast to Pope's view of Britain's magnetism, Barbauld inverts the image of the New World "savage," marveling at England's power with a view of an American tourist walking over the graves of famous English figures (such as Shakespeare, Locke, and Baillie) and the debris of Britain's once powerful culture. In the end, Barbauld proposes a fluid and ethereal view of the Spirit of Progress that escapes Britain and lands in America. This airy Spirit speaks to Barbauld's view of "empty homogenous time" and of the failures of natural boundaries. Barbauld collapses the distinction found in Pope between worlds "Old" and "New"—one that valorized the "Old" as a locus for cyclical renewal—and endorses the notion popularized in the Romantic period of *translation studii*: the movement of progress westward.

Barbauld undermines Pope's *garden state* using devices inherent to the prospect poem. After all, all prospects (ocular or literary) can be obscured, can be blinkered, and can fail. Barbauld carefully mimics the prospect poem's form with excruciating detail, including the Muses' eye, the invocation, the heroic couplets, and the historic sites. But these similarities only highlight the different ends to which a poet can use these formal elements. In other words, despite the conventions buttressing the prospect poem, the ideas that undergird it can form a rhizomatic underpresence that can be used for different ends. Barbauld's more Romantic view of the prospect poem works precisely because of the recognition that the prospect casts both images and shadows. Clearly, Pope's training as a Neo-Augustan poet and Barbauld's development as a Romantic poetess also play a crucial formal role. One particular Romantic motif almost goes undetected in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*: the role of walking. Pope does not walk in *Windsor-Forest*, neither in poetic structure nor in figuration. Rather, as mentioned earlier, he stands still. While standing still seems limited, the Neo-Augustans viewed standing as objective, public, and commanding. The standing-from-a-hill trope invokes stature and power—a monarch elevated on a Hill and directing the commerce and traffic of the world—while the itinerant view invokes rambling, errancy, and waywardness. Though Barbauld's poetic eye also seems relatively static, her willingness to provide multiple views (one in England, the other in American) simulates the power of motion. Walking for William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge seemed to represent a contemplative and deeply personal mode that had to do less with statuesque prospects than with human interaction and local circuits. When Barbauld's tourist walks on the gravestones of Pope's canonical figures, he makes pedestrian not only the spirits of an age, but also the very epoch they

[4] Pope draws here on the historical moment when Iroquois Indian chiefs visited England in 1710.

inhabit. In providing a more chaotic and fluid temporality Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* also creates a moving "Spirit of progress" that moves with time rather than against it.